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Adolescents' Gender Mistrust: Variations and Implications for the Quality of Romantic Relationships

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Abstract

Recent research demonstrates that perceptions of gender mistrust are implicated in lower marriage rates among low-income populations. Yet few quantitative studies have examined the factors predicting gender mistrust during adolescence and whether it influences the quality of subsequent nonmarital romantic relationships. Analysis of three waves of data from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (N = 1,106) indicates that in addition to neighborhood poverty rates, parents' own gender mistrust and parent–child relationship quality are related to adolescents' gender mistrust, suggesting that parents play an important role in influencing adolescents' developing feelings of gender mistrust. Perceptions of gender mistrust are not related to whether adolescents are involved in dating relationships, but are linked to higher levels of jealousy and verbal conflict in adolescents' subsequent romantic relationships, albeit only for male adolescents.

Keywords

adolescence; dating; gender stereotypes; parent–adolescent relationship; socioeconomic status

Recent scholarship has focused on the damaging influence of gender mistrust, or general negative views of men and women, on union formation and stability. Several scholars have emphasized that gender mistrust contributes to lower marriage rates and greater relationship instability in economically marginalized urban neighborhoods (Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2004; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Furstenberg, 2001). Others, however, suggest that this explanation for lower marriage rates among poor individuals calls for a more nuanced investigation (Burton, Cherlin, Winn, Estacion, & Holder-Taylor, 2009; Estacion & Cherlin, 2010). Despite its popularity in academic and public discourse, empirically little is known about gender mistrust. Because almost all studies have focused on those in economically disadvantaged areas, the extent to which the prevalence of gender mistrust can be generalized beyond low-income settings is unclear. In addition, little quantitative research has examined factors associated with variations in endorsement of such attitudes. Furthermore, most research has focused on the influence of gender mistrust on transitions to marriage or cohabitation with inadequate attention to whether gender mistrust influences the quality of intimate relationships. Finally, despite the general recognition that relationship experiences at earlier stages of the life course may influence later marriage decisions and conduct within adult unions (Meier & Allen, 2009; Raley, Crissey, & Muller, 2007), research on gender mistrust has largely focused on adults who have already had children.

In this study, we investigate gender mistrust among adolescents. Using panel data from the Toledo Adolescent Relationship Study (TARS), a sample of adolescents (M = 16 years) from a range of socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds, we examine factors that are related to adolescents' gender mistrust. We also evaluate whether gender mistrust is linked to (a) the likelihood that young people are involved in romantic relationships 2 years later, and (b) the

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perceived quality of those relationships. Using unique longitudinal data with rich information about adolescents' romantic relationships, we advance our understanding of precursors of gender mistrust and the role of gender mistrust in shaping experiences of intimate relationships as young people transition from adolescence to early adulthood.

Prior Research on Gender Mistrust

A series of ethnographic studies have documented the existence of feelings of general mistrust between men and women and its influence on the lack of marriage or instability of marriage in economically disadvantaged communities. In the early 1960s, Rainwater (1970), who examined family life in an all-Black public housing project in St. Louis, Missouri, reported that the marital relationships he observed tended to involve spouses who doubted whether they could rely on one another. He stated, "Many people comment that both the husband and wife can be disloyal or irresponsible; women say that men run in the streets too much and men say that women cannot be trusted to remain faithful" (p. 170). More recently, based on field studies of low-income single mothers in several cities in the 1990s, Edin and later Edin and Kefalas concluded that mistrust of men was a major theme underlying women's stated reasons for not marrying. Many women did not believe that men could be faithful to one woman and some women even indicated that they had turned down marriage proposals because of this belief (Edin, 2000; Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Relying on focus groups with low-income unmarried mothers and fathers in an inner-city neighborhood in Philadelphia, Furstenberg (2001) noted that negative views of the other gender—women think that men are immature and unreliable, whereas men think that women expect too much of men and do not respect men—led women and men to be wary about relationships. Similar views were expressed by women in a marriage education program in a medium-sized city in the Midwest in the 2000s (Manning, Trella, Lyons, & Du Toit, 2010).

Several quantitative studies that used the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCW), a sample of unmarried parents, have also shown that gender mistrust may have negative implications on union formation among economically disadvantaged populations. Gender mistrust was measured by the following items: "Men [women] can't be trusted to be faithful" and "In a dating relationship, a man [woman] is out for one thing." Greater mistrust of the other gender was associated with lower marital expectations for both men and women (Waller & McLanahan, 2005) and lower odds of transitioning from being single to marriage or cohabitation, although for women only (Carlson et al., 2004; Waller & McLanahan, 2005). Conversely, a survey focused on economically disadvantaged single mothers using data from the Three-City Study (Estacion & Cherlin, 2010) found no associations between gender mistrust and women's total number of lifetime marriage and cohabiting relationships.

Taken together, these qualitative and quantitative studies illustrate the phenomenon of gender mistrust and its possible influence on the likelihood of union formation and the stability of unions among low-income adults. Yet it is unclear what factors are related to the development of this attitude, and to what extent the prevalence of gender mistrust and its links to intimate relationships can be generalized beyond low-income settings. Further, research has rarely examined whether gender mistrust is linked to relationship quality, such as the degree of verbal conflict and jealousy. The purpose of the current study is to investigate these questions, focusing on adolescents. We argue that investigating these questions at earlier stages of the life course will provide unique insight with regard to how gender mistrust develops and how it may influence individuals' experiences of intimate relationships during adulthood.

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Gender Mistrust Among Adolescents

Gender mistrust involves a range of attitudes and belies a single definition. Broadly, it encompasses people's general negative views of men and women, or typically women's and men's negative attitudes toward the other gender. Although it may include various aspects of life, such as controlling or manipulative behavior, financial irresponsibility, or addiction to drugs or alcohol, gender mistrust centers on stereotypical beliefs about men's and women's sexual conduct and mating strategies, such as men "playing" women to get sex; women getting pregnant to trick men into relationships; and the notion that men and women cannot be trusted to remain sexually exclusive (Coley, 2002; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Furstenberg, 2001; Rainwater, 1970).

Studies that explicitly examined gender mistrust among adolescents are rare. Yet, several studies have documented aspects of youth peer culture that may promote young women's and young men's negative views of the other gender with respect to intimacy. After studying inner-city young men aged 15 to 23 in Philadelphia, Anderson (1989) argued that young men's peer culture in disadvantaged neighborhoods placed a high value on men's sexual conquest and manipulation of women. Casual sex was regarded as a measure of a young man's worth and thus "a primary goal of the young man was to find as many willing females as possible" (p. 61). The stereotypical view of masculinity as sexually aggressive was accompanied by negative views and mistrust of women. Young women were seen as willing to offer sex and many young men did not trust that they were the only ones these women were dealing with. Another study by Eder, Evans, and Parker (1995), who studied middle-school students with a wider range of socioeconomic backgrounds in a medium-sized Midwestern community, has suggested that a peer culture emphasizing the sexual focus of young men's orientation toward young women and young men's mistrust of young women is not unique to the inner city. They found that male adolescents developed a view that young women were objects for sexual conquest. Negative terms such as *slut* or *whore* were used casually and frequently to describe young women. Similar patterns were found in other studies of middle- and working-class adolescents (Kimmel, 1994; Wight, 1994).

These ethnographic studies have illustrated aspects of youth culture that may promote male and female adolescents' negative views of the other gender and that exist across a wide range of social locations. It is nevertheless unclear to what extent individual adolescents hold negative views of the other gender and what factors are related to variations in such views. In addition, it is unclear whether and how gender mistrust is related to later relationship development among adolescents and young adults. This study investigates these questions.

Factors Influencing Gender Mistrust Among Adolescents

Drawing on prior research on gender mistrust and social psychological research on attitude formation, we examine how economic disadvantages, race/ethnicity, family, and young people's own experiences might be associated with the development of gender mistrust.

Economic disadvantage—Prior research has emphasized that gender mistrust is more prevalent among economically disadvantaged groups. Furstenberg (2001) contended that men's lack of stable employment would result in the absence of daily routines and men's lack of self-confidence as breadwinners, which would lead men to substance use, controlling behavior, or infidelity, thus resulting in more pervasive gender mistrust among those in low-income settings. Anderson (1989) argued that men's poor employment prospects in the community led young men to believe that sexual conquests were the way to demonstrably prove their manhood. As a result, we expect that three indicators of economic disadvantage

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—higher neighborhood poverty rates, lower levels of parental education, and lower family income—will be associated with higher levels of gender mistrust.

Race/ethnicity—Wilson (1996), who studied low-income communities in Chicago in the late 1980s, maintained that gender mistrust was found more frequently among Black men and women than among their counterparts from other racial or ethnic groups. Research on adolescent sexual behavior has shown that Black adolescents, especially male adolescents, are more likely than their White or Hispanic counterparts to have sex at early ages and with a greater number of partners (Browning, Leventhal, & Brooks-Gunn, 2004). Additionally, Black male youths were more likely than youths from other racial or ethnic backgrounds to self-define as a "player" (Giordano, Longmore, Manning, & Northcutt, 2009). Explanations for these racial differences include Blacks' greater socioeconomic disadvantage and more tolerant attitudes toward early sexual activity compared to those of other racial or ethnic groups (Furstenberg, Morgan, Moore, & Peterson, 1987). Eyre, Auerswald, Hoffman, and Millstein (1998) found that the Black adolescents they interviewed often expressed preoccupation and concern with infidelity of their dating partners and noted that "withdrawal of trust" (p. 403) was one outcome of such concerns. Thus, we expect that Black adolescents, especially female adolescents will report greater gender mistrust than their counterparts from other racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Family—Parents may shape young people's gender mistrust in several ways. Bandura's (1982) social learning theory suggests that parents influence children's attitude formation through role modeling. Adolescents living outside of two biological parent families may have more opportunities to witness infidelity or other issues in their parents' relationships than those living with two biological parents. Indeed, low-income single mothers most often believed that their daughters learned about distrust of men from observing their (the mothers') romantic relationships with men (Coley, 2002). Social learning also involves adolescents learning from parents' verbal expressions of their attitudes (Bandura, 1982), in this case, parents' own gender mistrust. Women in Furstenberg's (2001) focus groups stated that they were told by their mothers from early childhood not to depend on a man because he could eventually leave them. Coley (2002) reported that few low-income mothers shared positive general lessons about men with their daughters. In addition, on the basis of Bowlby's (1979) attachment theory, which emphasized that the nature of the parent–child relationship has important implications for other types of relationships, we expect that adolescents whose relationships with parents are less warm or unsupportive may perceive other interpersonal relationships in a similar light.

Adolescents' experiences—A life course perspective suggests that individuals' life experiences may have implications for the development of gender mistrust beyond economic disadvantages and parents' attitudes or behaviors (Moen, Erickson, & Dempster-McClain, 1997). As adolescents mature, they begin to develop their own human and social capital. Adolescents who are high achieving academically may have developed a more positive world view in general and thus may have less negative views of the other gender. For example, Betts, Rotenberg and Trueman (2010) found reciprocal linkages between academic performance and interpersonal trust: in a grade school sample, higher scores on trust were associated with better academic performance and academic performance further enhanced well-being and positive world views.

Adolescents' gender mistrust may also be influenced by such experiences as unreliable dating partners. Edin and Kefalas (2005) emphasized that women's mistrust of men was often derived from personal experiences of being cheated or unfairly treated in the past. Further, we expect that sex outside of a committed relationship may contribute to the

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development of gender mistrust, as it provides an experiential base regarding the occurrence of casual sex among peers.

Does Gender Mistrust Influence the Quality of Romantic Relationship Experiences?—Another set of questions that this paper examines includes whether gender mistrust is associated with the likelihood of dating and the quality of subsequent romantic relationships. Because interest and involvement in dating relationships is a developmentally normative and defining feature of adolescence (Longmore, Manning, & Giordano, 2001; Sullivan, 1953), young people may get involved in romantic relationships in spite of a general sense of mistrust of the other gender. We expect, however, that gender mistrust may be related to relationship qualities. To date, only a small number of studies have empirically examined the link between gender mistrust and relationship quality. Rainwater (1970) reported that spouses with greater mistrust often accused each other of excessive jealousy. Carlson (2007), using the FFCW, found that mistrust of the other gender was related to perceived lower support and understanding of one's partner, albeit only for women. We argue that it is important to investigate this link during adolescence, because relationship experiences during this formative period may influence later conduct within adult unions (Meier & Allen, 2009).

We focus on four indicators of relationship quality: intimate self-disclosure, commitment, jealousy, and verbal conflict. As Jourard (1971) noted, sharing intimate details of life with a friend or partner is a barometer of closeness. Relationship commitment entails a belief in the future of the relationship, perceived ability to work through potential problems, and a greater stake in the relationship (Shulman & Scharf, 2000). In contrast, experiencing jealousy or verbal conflict is an indicator of relationship problems (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007). We expect that a greater level of gender mistrust is associated with less self-disclosure and less relationship commitment because adolescents with a higher level of gender mistrust may be wary about whether they can trust their partner and thus they may not want to self-disclose and commit to the relationship. Following Rainwater (1970), we expect that a greater level of gender mistrust is related to greater jealousy and more verbal conflict because adolescents with greater gender mistrust may be more suspicious about the possibility that their dating partner may be cheating. Guided by our prior research on adolescents' romantic relationship qualities (e.g., Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2006), we control for the duration of dating in addition to demographic characteristics, socioeconomic background, family, parent–child relationships, and adolescents' life experiences such as grades and sexual experience.

Current Investigation

The current study explored two questions regarding gender mistrust among adolescents across a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds. First, we assessed factors associated with gender mistrust. Guided by prior research, we explored how economic disadvantages, family structure, the quality of the parent–child relationship, parents' gender mistrust, and adolescents' own experiences were related to adolescents' gender mistrust. Second, we examined whether adolescents' gender mistrust was related to dating status (i.e., whether the respondent was in a romantic relationship) and specific qualities of current or most recent romantic relationships including the nature and intimacy of communication, levels of commitment to the relationship, jealousy, and verbal conflict.

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Method

Data

Data were drawn from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS), a longitudinal study of a stratified random sample of the year 2000 enrollment records of all youths registered for grades 7, 9, and 11 in Lucas County, Ohio, a largely urban metropolitan area that includes the city of Toledo. The sample came from 62 schools across seven school districts, although respondents did not have to attend school to be in the sample. The sample, devised by the National Opinion Research Center, includes oversamples of Black and Hispanic adolescents. In the first interview (Wave [W]1) conducted in 2001, 1,316 adolescents participated in the study. The second (W2) and third (W3) interviews were conducted in 2002–2003 and 2004–2005, respectively. At W3, 84.7% of the original sample (n = 1,114) were interviewed. Interviews were mostly conducted in the respondent's home using preloaded laptops to maintain privacy. Primary parents were administered a paper and pencil instrument at W1 only. Our analytic sample included the respondents who participated in all three waves of data collection (n = 1,110; 84.3%). We excluded respondents who had missing data on gender mistrust (n = 4; 0.3%), resulting in a final sample size of N = 1,106 respondents (572 female and 534 male youths). Those who dropped out of the longitudinal data were more likely to be Blacks or Hispanics, living outside of two biological parent families, having parents with lower levels of education, and living in areas with higher poverty rates.

The TARS provided a unique opportunity to examine our research questions for several reasons. First, the sample included adolescents with a wide range of sociodemographic characteristics that were very similar to those of the United States generally. In addition, adolescents and their parents were asked questions about gender mistrust and detailed information about adolescents' dating and sexual experiences, including relationship qualities. Finally, the longitudinal design allowed us to examine the associations using lagged independent variables.

Dependent Variables

Adolescents' gender mistrust was measured at W2. Female adolescents' mistrust of men was measured as the mean of 3 items (α = .57): (a) "Guys will say anything to get a girl," (b) "Most guys are always 'hitting on' girls," and (c) "You can't trust most guys." Male adolescents' mistrust of women was measured as the mean of 3 items (α = .62): (a) "Most girls are too boy crazy," (b) "Girls will often use a guy to make another guy jealous," and (c) "You can't trust most girls around other guys." The responses ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. We created gender mistrust scales for female and male adolescents separately because during pretest interviews female and male adolescents reported related but slightly different expressions with regard to negative views of the other gender.

Current dating status at W3 was measured by an ordered variable, which included "not dating," "dating less than 1 year," and "dating for 1 year or more." Four qualities of the current or most recent dating relationship measured at W3 were examined. These include intimate self-disclosure, commitment, jealousy, and verbal conflict. *Intimate self-disclosure* was measured as the average of 3 items (α = .99) regarding how often respondents talked to the partner about (a) something really bad that happened, (b) home life and family, and (c) private thoughts and feelings (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*). *Commitment* was the average of the following seven items (α = .92): (a) "How important is your relationship with X?" (1 = *not at all important* to 5 = *very important*); (b) "How would you rate your current relationship with X?" (1 = *not at all close* to 5 = *very close*); (c) " I want this relationship to

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stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter" (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*); (d) " I believe we can handle whatever conflicts will arise in the future" (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*); (e) "I am very confident when I think of our future together" (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*); (f) "We have the skills a couple needs to make a relationship work" (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*); and (g) "X always seems to be on my mind." (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). *Jealousy* was measured with one item: "When X is around other guys [young women], I get jealous (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). *Verbal conflict* was the average of two questions asking how often respondents and their partners (a) "had disagreements and arguments" and (b) "yelled or shouted at each other." Responses ranged from 1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*.

Independent and Control Variables

Economic disadvantage was measured with three indicators. *Percent neighborhood poverty* was created using census data for the adolescents' residential block group determined by address at the time of the first interview. *Parents' education*, measured as the highest level of schooling for either the primary parent or her or his spouse, reported by the primary parents at W1, was categorized as less than high school, high school diploma, some college, and college degree. High school diploma was used as the reference category. *Family income* at W1 was created by combining the primary parent's and the spouse's annual incomes. Annual incomes were measured as a categorical variable using the midpoint of the categories. The midpoint of the highest category was calculated by using a Pareto estimation for assigning a value to open-ended intervals. For the primary parent, $76,250 was assigned for the "$75,000 and over" category. For the spouse, $76,000 was assigned for the "$75,000 and over" category. All values except the top category were rounded and coded to represent thousands of dollars in annual family income.

Race/ethnicity was classified as non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, and other race or ethnicity, with non-Hispanic White used as the reference category.

Family structure was measured at W1 by four dummy variables, including two biological parents, single parents, stepfamily, and other family structure, with two biological parents as the reference category.

Parents' gender mistrust was measured at W1 as the mean of the following seven statements ($\alpha = .77$): (a) "Boys are only after one thing," (b) "Girls are too aggressive nowadays," (c) "I think some children have too much freedom to be around the opposite sex," (d) "Boys and girls play emotional games with each other," (e) "I think some parents allow their children too much freedom to date," (f) "It's better not to get too serious about one boy/girl in high school," and (g) "Nowadays girls are too boy crazy" (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Note that these questions focused on parents' views of heterosexual relationships among adolescents and not their views of adults' heterosexual relationships.

Poor parent–child relationship was measured at W1 as the average of four statements from adolescents' reports ($\alpha = .69$): (a) "My parents sometimes put me down in front of other people," (b) "My parents seem to wish I were a different type of person," (c) "My parents are clueless about a lot of things I do," and (d) "Sometimes I want to leave home" (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

Current adolescent's age at W2 or W3 was measured in years. *Adolescent's grades* in school was measured by self-report at W1 and ranged from 1 = *mostly F's* to 9 = *mostly A's*. Past relationship experiences at W1 were indexed by past sexual experiences and mistrusting current or most recent partner. *Adolescent's sexual experiences* at W1 were

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measured by three dummy variables: (a) never had sex, (b) have had sex, but only within a relationship, and (c) have ever had nonrelationship sex.

Experiencing mistrust in the current or recent relationship at W1 was measured by the following statement: "There are times when X cannot be trusted" (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Those who answered "agree" or "strongly agree" were coded as 1, whereas those who answered "strongly disagree," "disagree," or "neither" and those who had never dated were coded as 0. *Current dating status*, measured at W1 or W3, included the following three dummy variables: (a) not dating, (b) dating less than 1 year, and (c) dating for 1 year or more.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables in the multivariate analyses for female and male respondents. Descriptions for the total sample and a sample of those who dated in the past 2 years are presented because the associations between gender mistrust and qualities of dating relationships were examined using the "dating" sample, not the total sample. The mean age was 16.4 years at W2 and 18.2 years at W3 for both female and male adolescents. About 40% of female adolescents and 45.0% of male adolescents lived in neighborhoods with less than 5% poverty rate, 21.4% of female adolescents and 17.8% of male adolescents lived in neighborhoods with 5%–10 % poverty rate, 14.2% of female adolescents and 14.8% of male adolescents lived in neighborhoods with 10%–20% poverty rates, and 24.5% of female adolescents and 22.5% of male adolescents lived in neighborhoods with 20% or more poverty rates. The mean annual family income at W1 was $58,600 for female adolescents and $61,400 for male adolescents. The racial/ethnic composition was 65.2% White, 22.2% Black, 10.3% Hispanic, and 2.3% other race for female adolescents, and 62.4% White, 24.2% Black, 11.2% Hispanic, and 2.3% other race for male adolescents. About 49% of female adolescents lived with two biological parents, 26.6% lived with a single parent, 18.4% lived in stepfamilies, and 4.7% lived in other types of families, whereas 55.8% of male adolescents lived with two biological parents, 22.7% lived with single parents, 15.9% lived in stepfamilies, and 4.1% lived in other types of families.

Analytic Plan

We first examined bivariate associations between neighborhood poverty rates and gender mistrust, because of the emphasis of prior research on the uniqueness of gender mistrust in low-income neighborhoods. For multivariate analyses, we used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression or ordered logistic regression depending on the dependent measures. All models were examined for female and male adolescents separately because items used to create gender mistrust scales were gender-specific. First, we examined one model for female adolescents and male adolescents, respectively, to assess how economic disadvantages, race/ethnicity, family, and adolescents' experiences measured at W1 were related to adolescents' gender mistrust at W2. Second, we conducted one model for female adolescents and another for male adolescents to examine whether adolescents' gender mistrust at W2 was related to whether respondents were currently dating, dating less than one year, or dating for one year or more at W3. Last, using the subsample of adolescents who had dated in the previous two years (n = 512 for females; n = 474 for males), we examined four regression models for female adolescents and male adolescents separately to examine how adolescents' gender mistrust at W2 was related to four aspects of relationship quality at W3 (i.e., self-disclosure, commitment, jealousy, and verbal conflict). Note that we examined the same models with the sample that was restricted to those who were currently dating at the time of the interview only, as opposed to having dated in the previous 2 years, with similar patterns of findings.

Eighty-six respondents (7.7%) had missing data on one or more variables. Those who had missing data were more likely to be Black or Hispanic, to report lower grades, and to live in

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a poor neighborhood. To deal with missing data, we performed the multiple imputation (MI) method described by Allison (2002) using SAS with five imputations.

Results

Factors Associated with Adolescent Gender Mistrust

We found that mistrust of the other gender is fairly common among adolescents. As shown in Table 2, the average gender mistrust score at W2 was 3.4 for female adolescents and 3.2 for male adolescents (range = 1– 5). About 81% of female adolescents and 70.8% of male adolescents agreed or strongly agreed with at least 1 item indexing gender mistrust, although much lower percentages of young women (23.3%) and young men (18.0%) indicated agreement with all 3 items reflecting gender mistrust. At the bivariate level, adolescents' reports of gender mistrust varied by neighborhood poverty rate. For both female and male adolescents, gender mistrust was lower for adolescents who lived in neighborhoods with lower poverty rates. For example, 15.8% of female adolescents living in the most affluent neighborhoods agreed or strongly agreed with all 3 items reflecting mistrust of men, whereas 32.9% of female adolescents living in the least affluent neighborhoods did so. About 9% of male adolescents living in the most affluent neighborhoods agreed or strongly agreed with all 3 items reflecting mistrust of women, whereas about 35% of male adolescents living in the least affluent neighborhoods did so. Neighborhood poverty rates tended to be related to several other factors, such as parents' SES, race/ethnicity, family structure, and parent–child relationships that might also be related to gender mistrust, and thus it is important to examine the associations using multivariate analyses, reported in Table 2.

In multivariate analyses, we examined whether neighborhood poverty rates, parents' education, family income, race/ethnicity, family structure, parent–child interactions, parents' gender mistrust, and adolescents' own experiences, all measured at W1, were related to adolescents' reports of gender mistrust at W2. OLS regression models were examined for female adolescents and male adolescents separately. Table 3 shows that race/ethnicity, parents' mistrust of adolescent intimate relationships, and parent–child relationships at W1 were significantly related to female adolescents' mistrust of men at W2. Black female adolescents as well as female adolescents from other racial backgrounds were more likely to report mistrust of men than were White female adolescents. Parents' greater gender mistrust was positively related to female adolescents' greater mistrust of men. Poorer parent–child relationship quality was also related to higher levels of female adolescents' mistrust of men. Contrary to expectations, neighborhood poverty rates, SES, and family structure were not related to female adolescents' greater mistrust of men, once we included other factors.

Turning to male adolescents' mistrust of women, the results show that neighborhood poverty rates, race/ethnicity, parents' gender mistrust, parent–child relationships, and male adolescents' own sexual experience at W1 were significantly related to male adolescents' mistrust of women at W2. Male adolescents who lived in the poorest neighborhoods—neighborhoods with more than 20% poverty rates—were more likely than male adolescents who lived in more affluent neighborhoods to report mistrust of women. Hispanic male adolescents were more likely to report mistrust of women than were White male adolescents. As found for female adolescents' mistrust of men, parents' greater gender mistrust and poorer parent–child relationship quality were related to male adolescents' greater mistrust of women. In addition, male adolescents who reported ever having nonrelationship sex at W1 were more likely than male adolescents who had never had sex to report greater mistrust of women. Family structure was not related to male adolescents' mistrust of women.

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Associations Between Gender Mistrust and the Likelihood of Dating and Relationship Qualities

Is gender mistrust related to the likelihood of dating and qualities of dating relationships? Our results indicated that gender mistrust at W2 was not related to relationship status at W3—whether respondents were currently dating, dating less than one year, or dating for one year or more (results not shown). Given this finding, we examined the associations between gender mistrust at W2 and relationship qualities at W3 among respondents who reported having dated in the previous 2 years. The vast majority of the sample (89%) had dating experience in the last 2 years. Those who were not currently dating were asked about relationship qualities of the most recent relationship.

Contrary to expectations, for female adolescents, gender mistrust at W2 was not related to intimate self-disclosure, commitment, jealousy, or verbal conflict in the current or most recent relationship at W3 (Table 4). For male adolescents, however, gender mistrust was related to some aspects of relationship qualities. As shown in Table 5, male adolescents' mistrust of women was related to higher levels of jealousy and higher levels of verbal conflict, although it was not related to levels of self-disclosure or commitment.

Discussion

Researchers have debated the role of gender mistrust in influencing marriage decisions (e.g., Burton et al., 2009; Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Most research, however, has focused on those in economically disadvantaged communities; little research has examined this attitude beyond this specific segment of the population. Furthermore, very little quantitative research has examined factors associated with variations in endorsement of such negative views of men and women. In addition, most work has focused on adults, especially those who already have children, despite the importance of the adolescent years for the formation of relationship skills and expectations. We drew on longitudinal data from adolescents with diverse SES and racial and ethnic backgrounds to examine what background factors might be related to the degree to which young people hold this attitude and to what extent it might be linked to the qualities of subsequent romantic experiences. Our findings provide unique insights that allow us to reorient current thinking about gender mistrust and move beyond the prior research in this area.

We find that gender mistrust is common among adolescents. The vast majority of female adolescents (81%) and male adolescents (71%) reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with at least 1 item indicating mistrust of the other gender. As the literature on gender mistrust among adults emphasized, levels of gender mistrust are higher among adolescents who lived in neighborhoods with higher poverty rates. Nevertheless, it is important to note that negative views of the other gender among adolescents are not unique to adolescents who reside in high-poverty areas. About 75% of female adolescents and about 63% of male adolescents living in the wealthiest neighborhoods agreed or strongly agreed with at least 1 mistrust item. Further, multivariate analyses showed that after controlling for other factors, neighborhood poverty rates were not related to female adolescents' mistrust of men, although the association remains significant for male adolescents' mistrust of women. These findings are somewhat consistent with prior research on adolescents' peer culture, which emphasizes the pervasiveness of negative images of the other gender across different social strata (e.g., Eder et al., 1995). Whether this is unique to the particular life stage of adolescence is unclear. It will be useful to examine whether such stereotypical negative views of the other gender erode or are reinforced as young people move into adulthood and whether such patterns vary by SES.

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An important finding of this study is that parents appear to play a key role in shaping adolescents' gender mistrust. Contrary to our predictions, family structure, which may reflect parents' role modeling of intimate relationships, was not related to adolescents' reports of gender mistrust. Rather, our findings indicate that parents influence their adolescent children's development of gender mistrust through their own gender mistrust, suggesting the power of parents' verbal persuasion in influencing adolescents' social learning. Further, consistent with the idea of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979), parents appear to influence their adolescent children's perceptions of gender mistrust indirectly through the character of the parent–child relationship. This is in line with other research, which suggests the importance of the nature of the parent–child relationship for adolescents' developing romantic relationships (Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Longmore, Eng, Giordano, & Manning, 2009). Taken together, our findings, along with other research, suggest the importance of family processes in shaping the development of gender mistrust among adolescents.

Adolescents' own experiences, such as grades, sexual experience, and having had a romantic partner who could not be trusted, were not related to levels of mistrust of the other gender. It is somewhat surprising that actual reports of mistrust of one's dating partner in the past were not linked to current gender mistrust. As noted by Edin and Kefalas (2005) and Anderson (1989), a pregnancy and a birth may serve as the key life events that transform young people's optimism into deep cynicism—a finding that may explain why young people remain optimistic even in the face of experience with gender mistrust. One exception in our findings was that past experience of nonrelationship sex was related to young men's mistrust of young women. It is intuitive that past experience of nonrelationship sex may provide an experiential base for being less trustful of the other gender, although it is not clear why we find this relationship only for young men. It is possible that reciprocal effects might be involved. That is, young men who are more mistrustful of young women are more likely to have nonrelationship sex, which in turn may reinforce mistrust of the other gender.

We find some variations by race and ethnicity in the levels of gender mistrust. As anticipated, Black female adolescents were more likely than female adolescents of other racial or ethnic groups to report feelings of gender mistrust. This finding is consistent with Wilson's (1996) argument and also with prior findings indicating that endorsement of the "player" identity is more prevalent among Black male adolescents than among male adolescents from other racial or ethnic groups (Giordano, Longmore et al., 2009). In addition, we found that Hispanic male adolescents were more likely than male adolescents of other racial or ethnic groups to report feelings of mistrust of women. Explanations for this finding for Hispanic young men are unclear. Prior research has suggested that there are considerable variations among Hispanics by immigrant status and country of origin in sexual behaviors and attitudes among adolescents (Spence & Brewster, 2010) and levels of gender mistrust (Estacion & Cherlin, 2010). Our sample of Hispanics is too small to assess differences among Hispanics, however.

Our findings suggest that general negative views of the other gender do not prevent young people from getting involved in dating relationships. This is consistent with observations by Anderson (1989), which indicated that despite the air of gender mistrust among adults in the community, young women tend to believe that there are good men out there and continue to form relationships. These findings may not be surprising given that dating is a socially expected form of peer relationships during adolescent years and young people date for companionship, fun, exploration of sexual feelings, and to gain status with their peers (Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2009). Even among adults, studies have suggested that despite mistrust of men, many women continue to be involved in intimate relationships (Burton et al., 2009; Edin & Kefalas, 2005).

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Notably, we find that gender mistrust is related to relationship qualities, although we found somewhat unexpected gender differences. Contrary to prior research on adults that has emphasized the importance of women's mistrust in influencing the likelihood of marriage (Carlson et al., 2004; Waller & McLanahan, 2005) or relationship qualities (Carlson, 2007), female adolescents' mistrust of men was not related to any of the four measures of relationship qualities examined in the present analysis. In contrast, male adolescents' mistrust of women was related to higher levels of jealousy and verbal conflict within romantic relationships. Why did we find gender patterns that are contrary to findings in prior research that focused on adults? Two explanations may be possible. First, research has shown that female adolescents are more likely than male adolescents to forge intimate dyadic same-sex friendships in childhood, which allows them to develop intimate relationship skills that they bring to dating relationships (Collins & Sroufe, 1999). Such relationship skills may help female adolescents to enact "situated trust" (Burton et al., 2009) with a specific partner, offsetting the sense of mistrust of men in general. Compared to female adolescents, male adolescents tend to lack experience with intimate ways of relating (Maccoby, 1990), reporting a lack of confidence in navigating their relationships and a sense of greater power and influence exercised by the female adolescents they were dating (Giordano et al., 2006). Thus, male adolescents who have negative views of women in general may be more likely than their female counterparts to be wary about their specific relationships. Alternatively, Anderson (1989) suggested that young men who mistrust women were more likely to see an intimate relationship as a game and deliberately cause verbal conflict to gain control in their relationships with sexual partners. In any case, our findings indicate the merits of further investigation of young men's gender mistrust and its influences on relationship qualities and marriage expectations.

This study has some limitations that future research should address. Our measures of gender mistrust differed for female adolescents and male adolescents, which did not allow us to directly examine gender differences. Additional attention to the measurement of gender mistrust is warranted. Our study relies on items with modest alpha scores and further refinement may lead to an improved understanding and differentiation of gender mistrust. Future research should focus on the development of more refined measures of gender mistrust that are developmentally appropriate for adolescents and young adults. The measure of parents' gender mistrust used in this study focused on their views of adolescent romance. Although we would expect that parents' gender mistrust about adult relationships and adolescent romance may be closely related to each other, further research should examine how parents' own gender mistrust within adult relationships might influence offspring's gender mistrust. In addition, although prior research has indicated that experiences of sexual abuse in childhood tend to be related to greater gender mistrust (Burton et al., 2009), we were unable to examine childhood sexual abuse factors that might be related to gender mistrust. Further, it is possible that there may be some nonenvironmental factors, such as genetic or personality traits, that might influence both the endorsement of gender mistrust and experiences of negative relationship qualities. Finally, our sample was constrained to one geographic area, and further work based on national samples is warranted.

Recent attention to gender mistrust and its influence on marriage decisions among adults has led to new questions about the sources of gender mistrust and its implications for romantic relationship experiences at an earlier stage of life. We contribute by providing an analysis that permits investigation of variation in gender mistrust within a large, diverse sample of adolescents. We find that in addition to neighborhood poverty, parents play a key role in shaping adolescents' gender mistrust, especially through the relationships they develop with their adolescent children and what they may say to them about other adolescents' intentions when involved in intimate relationships. Although gender mistrust is not related to whether

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young people get involved in dating relationships, it is related to qualities of dating relationships that they experience, at least among young men.

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Table 1

Means (SDs) or Percentage Distributions for Variables in Analysis (N = 1,106)

	Female Adolescents		Adolescents	
	Total Sample (n = 572)	**Dated in the Past Two Years (n = 512)**	**Total Sample (n = 534)**	**Dated in the Past Two Years (n = 474)**
% poverty in neighborhood at W1				
< 5%	39.9	39.3	45.0	43.5
5%–10%	21.4	21.5	17.8	18.4
10%–20%	14.2	14.5	14.8	14.9
20%+	24.5	24.7	22.5	23.3
Parents' education at W1 (%)				
Less than high school	8.7	8.9	9.3	9.8
High school	28.1	27.4	23.3	24.2
Some college	33.6	34.1	38.0	37.0
College	29.6	29.6	29.4	29.1
Family income (in thousands) at W1 (*M*)	58.6 (36.1)	59.3 (36.0)	61.4 (34.9)	61.3 (35.3)
Race/ethnicity (%)				
White	65.2	65.6	62.4	62.7
Black	22.2	21.5	24.2	24.3
Hispanic	10.3	10.4	11.2	11.6
Other race	2.3	2.5	2.3	1.5
Family structure at W1 (%)				
Two biological parent family	48.8	48.4	55.8	55.7
Single parent family	26.6	26.6	22.7	22.6
Stepfamily	18.4	18.4	15.9	16.0
Other family type	4.7	5.3	4.1	4.4
Parents' gender mistrust at W1 (1–5) (*M*)	3.6 (0.6)	3.6 (0.6)	3.6 (0.6)	3.6 (0.6)
Poor parent–child relationship at W1 (1–5) (*M*)	2.3 (0.9)	2.3 (0.9)	2.3 (0.8)	2.3 (0.8)
Age at W2 (13–20) (*M*)	16.4 (1.8)	16.5 (1.8)	16.4 (1.7)	16.4 (1.7)
Age at W3 (15–22) (*M*)	18.2 (1.8)	18.3 (1.8)	18.2 (1.8)	18.2 (1.7)
Grades at W1 (1–9) (*M*)	6.5 (2.0)	6.6 (2.0)	5.9 (2.1)	5.8 (2.0)
Sexual experience at W1 (%)				
Never had sex	74.0	70.9	69.2	67.8
Ever had sex within a relationship only	10.8	11.9	10.1	10.4
Ever had nonrelationship sex	15.3	17.2	20.7	21.8
Ever had a partner who couldn't be trusted at W1 (%)	13.6	14.7	12.6	13.1
Dating status at W1 (%)				
Not dating	51.9	47.1	62.4	58.9
Dating less than 1 year	37.4	41.2	29.4	31.9
Dating 1 year or more	10.7	11.7	8.2	9.3
Gender mistrust (1–5) (*M*)	3.4 (0.8)	3.4 (0.8)	3.2 (0.7)	3.2 (0.7)

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	Female Adolescents		Adolescents	
	Total Sample (*n* = 572)	**Dated in the Past Two Years (*n* = 512)**	**Total Sample (*n* = 534)**	**Dated in the Past Two Years (*n* = 474)**
Dating status at W3 (%)				
Not dating	45.8	39.3	55.6	49.9
Dating less than 1 year	30.7	34.4	29.2	32.8
Dating 1 year or more	23.6	26.3	15.2	17.3
Relationship qualities at W3 (*M*)				
Self-disclosure (1–5)	n/a	4.0 (0.9)	n/a	3.6 (1.0)
Commitment (1–5)	n/a	3.9 (0.9)	n/a	3.6 (0.9)
Jealousy (1–5)	n/a	2.8 (1.2)	n/a	2.8 (1.1)
Verbal conflict (1–5)	n/a	2.3 (0.9)	n/a	2.3 (0.9)

Note. Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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Table 2

Gender Mistrust at W2 by % Neighborhood Poverty at W1 (N = 1,106)

	Female Adolescents (n = 572)				Adolescents (n = 534)			
	M	***SD***	**Agree for all items (%)**	**Agree for at least one item (%)**	***M***	***SD***	**Agree for all items (%)**	**Agree for at least one item (%)**
Total sample	3.4	0.8	23.3	80.9	3.2	0.7	18.0	70.8
By % neighborhood poverty								
< 5%	3.3	0.8	15.8	75.0	3.1	0.7	9.2	62.6
5%–10%	3.4*	0.8	21.2	78.8	3.2***	0.7	16.8	72.7
10%–20%	3.5***	0.7	30.8	87.7	3.2***	0.7	20.5	78.3
20% or more	3.6***	0.8	32.9	88.6	3.5***	0.7	34.9	80.9

Note. Differences from < 5% neighborhood poverty are statistically significant at

* p <.05.

** p < .01.

*** p < .001 (two-tailed t-test).

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Table 3

Ordinary Least Squares Regression Coefficients Predicting Factors at W1 Related to Gender Mistrust at W2 for Female Adolescents and Male Adolescents (N = 1,106)

	Female Adolescents (n = 572)		Male Adolescents (n = 534)	
	b	SE	b	SE
% poverty in neighborhood (W1)				
< 5%	—	—	—	—
5%–10%	−.021	.083	.063	.086
10%–20%	−.035	.105	.006	.100
20%+	−.153	.104	.216*	.104
Parents' education (W1)				
Less than high school	.088	.123	.007	.122
High school diploma	—	—	—	—
Some college	−.083	.080	−.087	.081
College	−.091	.091	−.167	.094
Family income (W1)	−.002	.001	.000	.001
Race/ethnicity				
White	—	—	—	—
Black	.365***	.094	.081	.092
Hispanic	−.069	.109	.209*	.106
Other race	.456*	.208	.273	.203
Family structure (W1)				
Two biological parent family	—	—	—	—
Single parent family	.136	.091	.060	.092
Stepfamily	−.007	.088	.008	.088
Other family type	−.071	.157	.094	.167
Parents' gender mistrust (W1)	.178***	.052	.199***	.057
Poor parent–child relationship (W1)	.104**	.038	.087*	.041
Age (W2)	−.021	.021	.008	.020
Grades (W1)	−.032	.018	−.015	.017
Sexual experience (W1)				
Never had sex	—	—	—	—
Ever had sex within a relationship only	−.091	.115	.102	.112
Ever had nonrelationship sex	.057	.103	.241*	.097
Ever had a partner who couldn't be trusted (W1)	.057	.092	.152	.093
Dating status (W1)				
Not dating	—	—	—	—
Dating less than 1 year	.028	.067	.045	.071
Dating 1 year or more	.104	.113	−.010	.117
Intercept	3.164***	.412	2.143***	.405

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	Female Adolescents (*n* = 572)		Male Adolescents (*n* = 534)	
	b	**SE**	**b**	**SE**
R^2	.162***		.167***	

Note.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

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Table 4

Ordinary Least Squares Regression Coefficients Predicting Associations Between Gender Mistrust at W2 and Quality of Romantic Relationships at W3 for Female Adolescents(N = 512)

	Self-Disclosure		Commitment		Jealousy		Verbal Conflict	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Mistrust of men (W2)	−.076	.058	.005	.052	.051	.074	.051	.055
% poverty in neighborhood (W1)								
< 5%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5%–10%	−.008	.112	.049	.100	.050	.142	−.020	.106
10%–20%	−.059	.139	.229	.125	.225	.179	.100	.133
20%+	−.162	.139	−.111	.125	.133	.178	.004	.133
Parents' education (W1)								
Less than high school	−.111	.162	−.009	.144	−.001	.208	.090	.154
High school diploma	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Some college	−.062	.109	.069	.097	.297*	.140	.054	.104
College	−.205	.125	−.292**	.110	.045	.159	−.103	.118
Family income (W1)	−.001	.002	−.001	.001	.001	.002	.000	.002
Race/ethnicity								
White	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Black	−.269*	.127	−.053	.114	−.177	.162	.207	.121
Hispanic	−.074	.148	−.223	.132	.129	.189	.057	.141
Other race	.009	.263	.092	.235	−.271	.336	−.081	.250
Family structure (W1)								
Two biological parent family	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Single parent family	−.032	.122	−.047	.109	−.083	.156	.323**	.118
Stepfamily	.136	.118	−.034	.105	−.054	.151	.137	.112
Other family type	−.309	.202	−.073	.178	.258	.255	.281	.191
Parents' gender mistrust (W1)	.133	.073	.141*	.065	.050	.091	.116	.070
Poor parent–child relationship (W1)	−.021	.052	−.027	.046	.137*	.066	.132**	.049
Age (W3)	.053*	.027	.077**	.024	−.047	.035	.006	.026
Grades (W1)	−.006	.024	.002	.021	.031	.031	−.045	.023

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	Self-Disclosure		Commitment		Jealousy		Verbal Conflict	
	b	**SE**	**b**	**SE**	**b**	**SE**	**b**	**SE**
Sexual experience (W1)								
Never had sex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ever had sex within a relationship only	.193	.138	.202	.129	−.063	.178	−.107	.130
Ever had nonrelationship sex	−.074	.133	.152	.123	.241	.174	−.023	.131
Ever had a partner who couldn't be trusted (W1)	.041	.119	−.151	.106	−.048	.151	.138	.113
Dating status (W3)								
Not dating	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dating less than 1 year	.202*	.097	.230**	.086	−.251*	.123	−.414***	.092
Dating 1 year or more	.414***	.103	.617***	.093	.159	.132	.063	.098
Intercept	2.927***	.636	1.855***	.569	2.677***	.813	1.546***	.604
R^2	.098***		.185***		.059***		.198***	
N	509		509		510		510	

Note.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

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Table 5

Ordinary Least Squares Regression Coefficients Predicting Associations Between Gender Mistrust at W2 and Quality of Romantic Relationships at W3 for Male Adolescents(N = 474)

	Self-Disclosure		Commitment		Jealousy		Verbal Conflict	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Mistrust of women (W2)	.106	.069	.051	.058	.334***	.077	.133*	.059
% poverty in neighborhood (W1)								
< 5%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5%–10%	−.045	.132	−.147	.110	−.054	.147	.052	.112
10%–20%	−.066	.156	−.077	.130	−.092	.173	.067	.132
20%+	.071	.159	.052	.133	−.332	.177	.086	.135
Parents' education (W1)								
Less than high school	−.514**	.188	−.225	.153	−.332	.202	−.231	.155
High school diploma								
Some college	−.114	.129	−.179	.105	.047	.140	.003	.106
College	−.134	.149	−.229	.124	−.122	.164	−.203	.124
Family income (W1)	.000	.002	.001	.002	.000	.002	−.001	.002
Race/ethnicity								
White	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Black	.084	.143	−.004	.119	−.015	.159	.330**	.121
Hispanic	−.033	.159	.032	.133	.142	.178	.299*	.136
Other race	.321	.382	−.051	.319	−.320	.427	−.319	.326
Family structure (W1)								
Two biological parent family	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Single parent family	−.104	.142	−.074	.118	−.095	.158	.025	.120
Stepfamily	.256	.135	.259*	.113	.214	.151	.073	.116
Other family type	.022	.246	.057	.205	−.409	.275	−.400	.210
Parents' gender mistrust (W1)	−.115	.087	−.030	.073	.026	.098	−.051	.073
Poor parent–child relationship (W1)	.008	.064	−.033	.053	.149*	.072	.026	.055
Age (W3)	.061*	.030	.028	.025	.026	.034	.083*	.026
Grades (W1)	.050	.026	.020	.022	.038	.029	−.005	.022

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	Self-Disclosure		Commitment		Jealousy		Verbal Conflict	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Sexual experience (W1)								
Never had sex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ever had sex within a relationship only	.142	.174	.184	.145	−.100	.194	.024	.150
Ever had nonrelationship sex	−.016	.147	.206	.123	−.034	.162	.210	.125
Ever had a partner who couldn't be trusted (W1)	−.132	.140	−.003	.117	.305	.156	.069	.119
Dating status (W3)								
Not dating	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dating less than 1 year	.386***	.105	.488***	.089	.004	.119	−.314***	.090
Dating 1 year or more	.491***	.134	.666***	.111	.226	.149	.171	.114
Intercept	2.217***	.689	.640***	.767	.504***	.586	2.757***	.574
R^2	.119***		.105***		.200***		.179***	
n	465		466		468		468	

Note.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

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